



PRIEST
DANIEL SYSOEV
HOW
WE SHOULD
VIEW THE
GOVERNMENT
X

• HOW TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE •

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From the beginning inequality was established in the world, for it is a great blessing, and it will remain for all time. If there is inequality in the world there must also be a force to harmonize that inequality, that everything in the universe might find its place in this choir. In human society this harmonizing force is the government. How was it established by God? What happens if the government is abolished? What forms of government exist, and is one more preferable than another? How should we view rulers who do not know God? The answers to these questions and many others are found in this booklet.

*Booklet 10 of 12 from a series of talks given by Priest
Daniel Sysoev entitled "How to Inherit Eternal Life."*

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ON HOW WE SHOULD VIEW THE GOVERNMENT

Holy Scripture on Government

At every divine service the Orthodox Church prays for the civil authorities, because this is explicitly required by Holy Scripture. The apostle Paul says, *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

How Did the Institution of Government Appear?

Holy Scripture directly states that the source of all authority is God, *the King of kings, and Lord of lords* (1 Tim. 6:15); *the prince of the kings of the earth* (Rev. 1:5, cf. Dan. 2:47).

God's authority is by right of creation, and He possesses absolute power and the fullness of might and ownership. In the biblical view, the sole owner in all the universe is the Creator. By right of creation He owns heaven and earth and all that is therein. For this very reason the Bible prohibits permanent sale of land. One may sell land for a period of up to fifty years, depending on the number of harvests. A person may own the harvest, but not the land. How did God create the world? He could have created a world of absolute equality, but this was not pleasing to God. From the beginning inequality was established in the world, for it is a great blessing, and it will remain for all time. We also know that in the Kingdom of Heaven there will be no such thing as equality: *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory* (1 Cor. 15:41). The same will be true at the resurrection of the dead.

If there is inequality in the world there must also be a force to harmonize that inequality, that everything in the universe might find its place in this choir. There is a hierarchy within the human body, and there is a particular

hierarchy in a system of living organisms. For example, the bees, which are unequal, have a queen bee, drones, and worker bees. Ants, wolves, and even fish, who travel in shoals, have a similar hierarchal system. The hierarchy of "superior—subordinate" is likewise established in the overall world order, so that the world might exist as a diverse whole. One of God's primary tasks is to keep equality in check. For example, if a person's thoughts turn toward desiring equal possessions, this is called envy; if the desire is acted upon it is then called theft.

If we examine the history of mankind we will see that from the very beginning God has creates unequal, mutually subordinate beings. The first man Adam was appointed lord of all creation. *And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth* (Gen. 1:26). The Lord immediately made Adam king over the animal kingdom, and a sign of this authority was their naming, when Adam gave names to all living beings:

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (Gen. 2:20). Giving a name is a sign of authority. For this reason when parents give names to their children they are exercising their authority over them. The father has the primary voice in the matter of naming, since he has preeminence in the family.

When God created Eve from Adam's rib He created her a helper for her husband: *But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:20—23).* Thus a mutual subordination was established: the husband and the woman who helped him. After the first people's fall into sin, when this hierarchy was distorted, God introduced direct authority. Likewise, the authority of parents over their children, of a father over his son, originates from the relationship within the

Trinity—between God the Father and God the Son. Christ said that He is obedient to the Father in all things: *The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise* (Jn. 5:19). On earth also children must be obedient to their parents. As the apostle Paul says, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right* (Eph. 6:1). These intrafamilial relations give rise to the first societal government-like hierarchies, called generations. As it is said, *Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations* (Gen. 6:9). In the world before the flood people lived within a patrimonial structure. There were no governments; hence each did as he pleased. This complete freedom resulted in the Great Flood. *And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth* (Gen. 6:12). Anarchy caused the total collapse of the first world. To the Orthodox Church, government is always better than anarchy! For anarchy gives any bandit or criminal a right to crime.

If government is abolished, a country is instantly plunged into chaos. Imagine Moscow: all the jewelry stores, banks, and mu-

seums would promptly be looted. Money would instantly become mere paper, because it would no longer be backed by the government. People would be robbed in the streets, there would be no electricity, trash removal would stop, and medical centers would cease to operate. All public transportation would grind to a halt. Gas would be the next thing to disappear. It would all end in famine and mass exodus from the cities. Survival would be possible only in the villages, living off the produce of one's own garden and banding together with groups of confederates to defend it from hungry bands of marauders from the city. Every kind of evil would come to the surface, and it would be impossible to restrain it. The law of the sword would ensue, and men would turn into animals.

Formation of Government After the Great Flood

After the Great Flood God concluded a covenant with Noah, which forms the basis for all government to this day. *And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the*

fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein (Gen. 9:1-7). God commanded men to bring forth abundantly. This particularly pertained to the descendants of Japheth (the Europeans), who populated the whole earth. The Lord introduced the law of capital punishment for murder, which became a fundamental part of law in all subsequent governments. The army has a right to kill for this very reason: the foe wishes to shed the blood of our citizens, and preventing this atrocity is the duty of the army, which has

explicit authority from God to do so. Prior to the Middle Ages there were no executioners; their duties were performed by soldiers. For one of the commandments is to prevent atrocities. The court system appeared to determine whether a person is guilty. Any government is built upon two principles, which it is obligated to uphold: the preservation of order and the preservation of justice.

Scripture first mentions a kingdom in the tenth chapter of the book of Genesis: *And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city* (Gen. 10:8–12). King Nimrod established the first kingdom on earth and the first cities, the largest of which was Babylon. But King Nimrod went against God and began building the Tower of Babel. Then the Lord confounded the tongues and scattered the people throughout the earth. God determines

the seasons and the bounds for the habitation of each of the nations.

Theocracy as the Highest Form of Rule

Which form of rule is correct? According to the Bible, only the authority of the Lord God. The authority of the Creator is the norm. Holy Scripture speaks of the highest form of rule—theocracy, the authority of God over the chosen people through prophets or judges. This form of rule existed in the days of Moses, Joshua the son of Nun, and the judges of Israel, up until Saul. This period of God's maximal authority over Israel was also the period of the greatest freedom. There was God's law, given through Moses; there was a judge, whose chief task was to defend Israel from external threats and to ensure just judgment. The judges defended the people, but they did not interfere in their internal affairs. There were not even any taxes. The people lived and did as they pleased; they were free, but within the limits of the Word of God. Then came a fall—Israel fell into sin, as described in the first book of Samuel: *Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said*

unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them (1 Sam. 8:4—7).

The Advent of Monarchy

According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his

chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles. And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord. And

the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city (1 Sam. 8:8–22).

After this they chose Saul to be king, but he proved unfit in the Lord's eyes. Then God appointed King David, a king after His own heart. As God said through the prophet Hosea, *I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath* (Hos. 13:11). The Lord said that if the people would be faithful to God He would preserve His mercy toward them, no matter what. When God gave His covenant to King David He warned him: *There shall not fail thee a man in My sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before Me as thou hast walked before Me* (1 Kgs. 8:25). In the book of Deuteronomy the Lord says that a king must read the law of God each day. In this way any ruler who knows God will be a good ruler. God divides the kingdom of Israel in punishment for the sin of Solomon, and so it may be said that for God state interests are not an end in themselves. It is God Who anoints kings to kingship.

Conflicts Between Loyalty to State and to God

When God brought King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to Jerusalem, the reigning king Zedekiah appealed to the prophet Jeremiah and asked that he pray to the Lord that they miraculously be saved. Jeremiah prayed, then related that God would do the following: he would burn the city and the temple and disarm the army for the apostasy of Israel; and even if the Hebrews were to slay all the Chaldeans, and put the rest to flight, the Lord would make the wounded to arise and take the city. Jeremiah went about saying that if any man wished to please God he should yield himself prisoner. People accused him of treason and wanted to kill him, but they did not, for they saw that he was a prophet. God sometimes destroys kingdoms as He sees fit.

How Should We View Rulers Who Do Not Know God?

All kings are accountable to God (both those who know Him and those who do not), Who promises vengeance upon those kings who vio-

late the moral law. Most interestingly, the Lord punishes them not so much even for idolatry as for treating the people poorly. The book of Kings contains an interesting episode describing Ahab, the ungodly king of Israel. For a long time God rebuked him, but when he killed an innocent man the Lord told him: On the place where you killed him the dogs will lick your own blood. And so it came to pass. Hence, violating the principles of justice, breaking the law, and committing unrighteous acts against his subjects are heinous crimes of a king before God. A classic example is King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whom God appointed to subjugate all the nations. When he became proud the Lord made him mad for "seven seasons." Every ruler in the world receives power from God, either because He wills this or because He allows it to happen (when a ruler is sent to a nation in punishment).

Other Forms of Rule Described in the Bible

In the kingdom of Israel there was an organization that is mentioned in the Bible, called the Knesset. Today it is called parliament, but in the Bible it is described as an assembly of the

elders or wise men. The king would make his decisions not groundlessly, but based on the decisions of his advisors. After the Babylonian captivity the religious community of Israel was governed by the high priest. This was the authority of the priests, who simultaneously held state power. The Old Testament Church did not object to this, though it was considered abnormal, since the work of priests is the law of God, the salvation of men; but the priests were also able to govern the nations. A similar situation arose later in the Christian era, when the bishops of Turkish-occupied territory were ethnarchs—rulers of all Christians under Turkish power. In the 20th century there were instances of bishops governing countries, such as Archbishop Macarios, who governed Cyprus. The Bible makes no objection whatsoever to this form of government.

In Holy Scripture we also find a form of rule known as oligarchy, where a council of elders governed Jerusalem during the period when there was no king.

The Bible also gives its view of republics: *But with their friends and such as relied upon them they kept amity: and that they had conquered kingdoms both far and nigh, insomuch*

as all that heard of their name were afraid of them: also that, whom they would help to a kingdom, those reign; and whom again they would, they displace: finally, that they were greatly exalted: yet for all this none of them wore a crown or was clothed in purple, to be magnified thereby: moreover how they had made for themselves a senate house, wherein three hundred and twenty men sat in council daily, consulting alway for the people, to the end they might be well ordered: and that they committed their government to one man every year, who ruled over all their country, and that all were obedient to that one, and that there was neither envy nor emulation among them (1 Macc. 8:12–16). Byzantium, for example, likewise had a republic of sorts, where the rank of emperor was not bestowed for life. The emperor was chosen for a specific term, by an interesting method: the emperor was whoever the army, the senate, and the patriarch supported.

The Kingdom of Grace: The Orthodox Church

In the time of Christ the Lord created a completely new kingdom on earth—a kingdom of

grace, the Orthodox Church. In the Church each person possesses complete freedom. There is a hierarchy—the spiritual authority of the successors to the apostles, the bishops, aided by the presbyters and the deacons. The chief Ruler of the Church is the eternal King and Lord Jesus Christ. *The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it* [Christ] (Rev. 21:24). The forms of rule by government appeared in the time of the covenant of Noah. Saint Justinian spoke of an ideal form of rule, and said that God gave mankind two gifts: priesthood and kingship. The priests have authority over men's souls, and the rulers—over their bodies. The interrelations of these two authorities should ideally be in a state of accord (*symphonia*). The priests must teach the rulers the standards of divine justice, providing a moral evaluation of the laws that the rulers enact. Kings ensure the welfare of their subjects, as well as justice. This is the principle on which the Church existed, beginning with Constantine the Great and ending with Nicholas II, or even lasting until King Alexander of Serbia, killed by the Bolsheviks in 1934.

The Church's View of Government

Concerning how we should regard government the Lord says, *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's* (Mt. 22:21). In this way Christ separated what belongs to God from what belongs to Caesar. The Roman government claimed that the emperor was in fact a sacred, divine being, and consequently demanded the homage due a divinity. The chief accusation against Christians in the Roman Empire was that they were opposed to the government, refusing to swear by the fortune of Caesar and to call Caesar "Lord." The Christians replied that their God was Christ, and that they prayed for Caesar. Scripture does not say for Christians not to pray for rulers who do not honor God. When the apostle Paul commanded Timothy to pray for the authorities, he was referring to the government of Nero (this epistle was written in A.D. 64). Nero, as we know, was an idolater and a lecher, who waged persecutions against the Christians and who executed the apostle Paul himself. But the apostle commands that he be prayed for, and explains why this

is necessary: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation* (Rom. 13:1–2).

Saint John Chrysostom, in explaining this epistle of Paul, says, "Whether you are an evangelist, whether you are a prophet, whether you are a bishop, whether you are a monk, you must submit to the government." Many Christians are more inclined to defiance than to obedience. Being accustomed to justify their lawlessness by calling it zeal, they say they have been freed by Christ, and so they need submit to no one. But this is incorrect, since the very principle of government is established by God. Thus, God does not justify usurpers, malefactors, and revolutionaries. As Blessed Augustine said, "A ruler who does not maintain justice is but the chieftain of a band of robbers."

Why does the Church support the government?

1) The principle of order is always better than chaos.

2) If secular government upholds the laws, it works for the benefit of the Church.

The apostle Paul made use of secular laws. When people wished to beat him for preaching Christ he said that he was a Roman citizen: *And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him (Acts 22:25–29).* Slandering the civil authorities is a sin against the fifth commandment. If a person must honor his father and mother, all the more so must he honor the government. The principle is simple: the lawless acts of any man, including those of a ruler, should be condemned, but one must not condemn the sovereign himself.

One may say that the president's decision is bad, but we have no right to say the same of the president himself.

There is a concept of honor that we render to a person by virtue of his position. For example, a priest may be a fornicator and an inveterate alcoholic, but until he has been defrocked we render him honor as to a priest. The same principle applies with regard to secular government. Rendering honor maintains order in the world. The Church has given over individual insurgents to anathema, including Stenka Razin, Grishka Otrepyev (False Dmitry I), Ivan Mazep, and Emelyan Pugachev. The task of the government is to restrain evil: *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same* (Rom. 13:3). Holy Scripture says nothing about the legitimacy of the government. For example, beginning with the children of Daniel of Moscow the rulers of Russia were illegitimate. Daniel of Moscow was not a great prince when he died, and all his descendants according to the laws of the time lost the right to the grand principality forever. Nevertheless, using bribes and intrigues they acquired the grand princi-

pality through the Horde, and yet the Church supported them—these unlawful, illegitimate rulers.

For [the ruler] is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13:4). There is such a thing as the presumption of innocence, which many today have replaced with a presumption of guilt: if a person is in power, they say, he is automatically dishonest. Scripture says that a ruler must repay evildoers for their misdeeds. A ruler must govern fairly, lawfully, and firmly. Any subverter of order must be punished. If a revolution arises in a country, it must be suppressed with tanks or any available means, and this is the explicit duty of the ruler, whose duty it is to maintain law and order. The right to impose capital punishment is also inherent to government, and any attempt to abolish it equates to the abolition of the government itself. It is logical therefore that Marat, Robespierre, and Lenin all fiercely opposed the death penalty. After coming to power, however, they unleashed a bloody reign of terror. Hence, all discussion

of abolishing capital punishment amounts to nothing more than leaving bandits at liberty. Here it is important to remember, however, that in the Bible the death penalty was prescribed exclusively in cases of premeditated murder. When he came to power in 1896, Nicholas II effectively imposed a moratorium on the death penalty, and upon returning from exile to Siberia many criminals returned to their former way of life. The results could be observed as early as 1905.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake (Rom. 13:5). First-century texts of the Liturgy show that after the consecration of the Holy Gifts the bishop would raise his hands and offer a prayer of sacrificial offering of the Eucharist for the emperor. There have been instances when, while a bishop was praying for the emperor, the emperor's soldiers burst in and slew the bishop, and all the while he continued to pray. This he would do in accordance with the dictates of the Word of God and the dictates of his conscience. Saint John Chrysostom says, "In submitting to the authorities do not think that you submit to a man, for by submitting to the civil authorities you submit to the Creator

of the universe." God rules all the rulers in the world to this day, and so the Church prays for the government. *For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing* (Rom. 13:6). The apostle Paul says that taxes are paid in order to maintain public officials—the ministers of God. The Church prays not only for Orthodox monarchy, for the Church has always existed outside the borders of Orthodox empires. Today the Church exists in democracies, in Islamic monarchies, and in a Zionist state, but everywhere the Church prays for the civil authorities and pays taxes. *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law* (Rom. 13:7–8). The apostle enjoins us to give to each what is commanded, whether taxes or a soldier's salary in wartime.

The concepts of failing to honor one's parents, failing to honor the civil authorities, and failing to honor God are very closely interrelated. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the*

*king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps (1 Pet. 2:13–21). In the writings of the apostle Peter we see this same principle of honoring the government. In the epistle of Jude it is said that heretics do not honor the government: *Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an ex-**

ample, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities (Jud. 1:7–8). According to the teaching of the holy fathers, a firm government restrains the antichrist from coming to power, because it can prevent an usurper from rising to power.

THE REV. DANIEL SYSOEV MISSIONARY CENTER

Benevolent Fund was established in 2010 by Rev. Daniel Sysoev's wife, Yulia Sysoev, to aid the needy families and widows of clergy. Unfortunately, there are many financially disadvantaged clergy families in Russia, but the greatest financial need is felt by the widows of priests who have fallen victim to murder or tragedy, and we Christians have a duty to care for them.

In recent times we have seen a rise in sudden deaths among our intercessors before God — those who pray for us more often than others, through whom the Lord forgives our sins, from whom we receive comfort. At present the Fund has learned of and established contact with 45 such families, and is constantly searching for clergy families in need so as to provide them with uncompensated aid.

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HOW WE SHOULD VIEW
THE GOVERNMENT

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